

# Elk Ridge Middle School 3659 West 9800 South South Jordan, Utah 84095

March 15-16, 2006



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

# THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

# Elk Ridge Middle School 3659 West 9800 South South Jordan, Utah 84095

March 15-16, 2006

## UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

# DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Foreword	ii
Utah State Board of Education	iii
Jordan School District Board of Education and District Administration	1
Elk Ridge Middle School Administration and Staff	2
Elk Ridge Middle School Mission Statement and Belief Statements	3
Members of the Visiting Team	4
Visiting Team Report	5
Chapter 1: School Profile	5
Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry	6
Chapter 2: The Self-Study Process	6
Chapter 3: Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness	7
Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals	8
Curriculum Development	9
Quality Instructional Design	10
Quality Assessment Systems	13
Leadership for School Improvement.	14
Community Building	15
Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning	16
Chapter 4: Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) Standards I-XI	17
Chapter 5: School Improvement Efforts – Action Plan	18
Chapter 6: Major Commendations and Recommendations of the Visiting Team	18

#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 15-16, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Elk Ridge Middle School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Raymond Jenson is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Elk Ridge Middle School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Elk Ridge Middle School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Brenda Hales	Executive Director, Curriculum and Staff Development
Moya Kessig	Executive Director, Human Resources

# **ELK RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

## **ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

# **School Administration**

Raymond Jenson	Principal
Melisa Lund	<u> </u>
Doug Hallenbeck	Assistant Principal

# Counseling

Alan Cox	
Kathy Dzierzon	
Andy Baggs	School Psychologist

# **Support Staff**

Jana Hardy	Janet Gray	Holly Taylor
JuLene O'Dell	Shane Dovle	

# **Faculty**

Jeri Albrecht	Darleen Gordon	Kameraon Oldroyd
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## ELK RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

In partnership with home and community, Elk Ridge Middle School will build commitment to learn, confidence to succeed, and courage to make a difference.

## **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- 1. All students can learn; student learning is the highest priority for the school.
- 2. Students learn best when they are actively engaged in solving problems and producing quality work.
- 3. A student's positive self-concept and appropriate behavior impact learning in a positive way.
- 4. Students need to communicate their understanding of essential knowledge and skills.
- 5. Teachers should be well-training professionals who adapt instruction to meet the needs and learning styles of individual students.
- 6. A safe and comfortable school environment promotes student learning.
- 7. Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs.

## MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ben Lems, Olympus Junior High School, Granite School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Thane Hutchinson, Mount Logan Middle School, Logan School District
Marvin Lowe, Mount Logan Middle School, Logan School District
Mary Lane, Bonneville Junior High School, Granite School District
Pam Mitchell, Syracuse Junior High School, Davis School District
Matt Norman, Pleasant Grove Junior High School, Alpine School District
Lisa Tonge, Bonneville Junior High School, Granite School District

## VISITING TEAM REPORT

## ELK RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

Elk Ridge Middle School is a public suburban middle school located in South Jordan, Utah. The school opened in 1994 and is an attractive, modern building completely accessible to handicapped students. The school serves 1,280 students in the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grades with a minority population of approximately 11 percent. The teacher/pupil ratio is 1 to 27.1 in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and 1 to 27.8 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The curriculum follows guidelines set by the Jordan School District and State Board of Education. In addition to basic subjects, students are offered a variety of classes in music, art, vocational education, and foreign language. Elk Ridge Middle School has three administrators, 50 teachers, two counselors, and one full-time psychologist. Forty-eight percent of the staff members have master's degrees and 17 are ESL-endorsed.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Limited data was provided in the school's self-profile. Data was not disaggregated or compared to district and state averages. From the data that was provided, it appears that language arts scores have tended to remain stable due to a school-wide commitment to reading and writing, while math and science scores have shown a decline. There is little evidence that student achievement data is used for curriculum development.

Staff members of Elk Ridge Middle School have done a good job analyzing their self-study to develop an effective action plan. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff gather data to update and make midcourse corrections to the plan as needed.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The staff of Elk Ridge Middle School understands the need to systematically collect and analyze data in order to guide decisions made by the school. The data needs to be disaggregated into a user-friendly format that is relevant and available to the staff in a timely manner. State and national criteria and norm-referenced tests, as well as district and school-generated data, should be disaggregated by content area, student group, gender, grade level, and ethnicity.

Student and parent input was primarily limited to surveys. More needs to be done to reach out to parents, the community, and students to include them in discussions and the decision-making process.

## **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the staff of Elk Ridge Middle School systematically collect and analyze pertinent student data to guide decisions made by the school.
- The Visiting Team suggests that the school design an effective data management system that can be utilized by different stakeholders within the school community. This effort should extend to disaggregating data by content area, student group, gender, grade level, and ethnicity.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school find ways to increase student and parent involvement in the self-study and goal setting process in order for all stakeholders to feel ownership of the school's action plan.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The school's Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP) committee is to be commended for its leadership in furthering the self-study process. Most staff members felt included and involved in the process. Teachers, counselors, and administrators worked collaboratively to complete departmental and focus group analyses. However, parents, students, and support staff had little input in the process. The Visiting Team encourages the school to consider creative ways to increase parent, student, and support staff in departmental and focus group discussions.

PTSA and Community Council members were kept informed of progress on the self-study during their monthly meetings. Information about the self-study was shared with the community primarily through newsletters.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The staff of Elk Ridge Middle School did a good job of assessing the school through the department analyses for classroom effectiveness and through the

focus group's evaluations of school-wide effectiveness. The work done by each department and focus group reflects a significant effort to identify areas of strength and limitations. Recommendations made by each group show a desire to work toward increasing student achievement.

# CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Elk Ridge Middle School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

## 1. Communication

A good communicator successfully works and communicates with others in a variety of ways like reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, painting, singing, playing instruments, dancing, etc. He/she has a concept of literacy in each content area and seeks to connect this knowledge to all aspects of his/her learning. He/she is familiar with and uses a wide range of texts from written music, maps and charts, and mathematical equations to classic literature, artistic representations, scientific experiments, and many more. A good communicator is also able to strategically interact and interconnect different types of texts. As part of effective communication with others, he/she uses appropriate methods to communicate with others and respond appropriately when receiving communication.

## 2. Complex Thinking

A complex thinker has acquired a variety of thinking skills and is capable of using them appropriately in diverse situations. He/she integrates new information with existing knowledge and experience and is able to apply thinking skills in a strategic manner. A complex thinker is also a good problem solver, able to analyze a problem, set a goal to fix that problem, plan a way to achieve the goal, monitor the plan's progress, and assess the achievement of the goal.

## 3. Collaboration

A good collaborator works effectively with others to identify and achieve specified results. He/she understands and serves in a variety of roles and can both lead and follow effectively. A collaborator can work in a variety of group and team settings and facilitates the group's objectives and progress. He/she uses a variety of resources including personnel, supplies, and technology. He/she is able to work with a variety of populations and accept ethnic minorities, differences in beliefs, values, and cultures.

## 4. Character Education

A person with good character possesses several attributes that make of him/her an exceptional person. Integrity in all that he/she does — work, play, and conversation — is an essential characteristic. He/she is a good citizen that demonstrates individual responsibility, practices a healthy lifestyle, and participates in activities that promote the public good. A person of good character is kind to others no matter the economic background, ethnicity, or appearance. He/she respects him/herself, family, friends, and those in authority.

## Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?

A consensus building process was established that involved members of the school community in defining the school's vision, beliefs, mission and goals. The school's Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP) committee directed the collaborative efforts to establish the school's vision, beliefs and mission.

Preliminary surveys of all stakeholder groups were performed to establish basic beliefs and a common vision for the school. Based on the results of the preliminary survey, the CSIP committee prepared five viable mission statements that aligned with the basic beliefs and vision for the school. Ballots were distributed to the stakeholders, and the best represented mission statement was put into place. As a result of these collaborative efforts, members of the school community feel that they "own" their mission. The Visiting Team recommends that the school gather an even greater representation of input from all stakeholder groups.

b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?

Elk Ridge Middle School has established a comprehensive set of beliefs that are validated by key principles of educational research on effective schools and classrooms. If the school community continues to rally in support of these basic premises, the school will undoubtedly provide a quality education to every child who attends Elk Ridge Middle School. As a result of this great work, the school has a unified sense of direction for the future. The school should vigorously continue to pursue opportunities to build consensus among all stakeholder groups in order to promote the beliefs, mission, vision and DRSLs of the school.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

At Elk Ridge Middle School the beliefs, mission, and vision seem to align with and support the school-wide DRSLs. The staff and administration have worked together well to come up with the DRSLs in an effort to establish a school-wide vision of what students should know and be able to do. Awareness of the DRSLs is evident among all stakeholder groups.

Each department at Elk Ridge Middle School has a collaborative meeting each quarter known as a RESULTS Cycle. These meetings are used to evaluate student achievement and to develop a student academic and behavioral goal to work on each quarter. A departmental pre- and post-test is given, which yields data used by each department to determine whether acceptable progress has been made on each goal. Departments share their results with other departments in order to celebrate successes.

The staff and administration should now move toward further defining each DRSL so that the entire school community is unified in knowing when a student is competent in each DRSL. A rubric for each DRSL may be an appropriate tool in providing a common set of judgment criteria that could be used within departments and school-wide.

## **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

A few faculty members and a couple of departments are in the early stages of collaborating to create curriculum maps that meet the standards of the State Core. While there are individuals who have worked to this effect, most departments have not taken on this specific task. During classroom visits, daily curriculum objectives were not always evident.

Literacy is embedded in the State Core Curriculum. Literacy is one area where there is widespread support by most teachers in the school. The school has adopted the DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) program. In a unique application, 30 minutes of reading time is rotated daily between classes. In addition, a school literacy committee has met and created lesson plans that teachers can use to instruct students on reading strategies pertinent to their particular subject. There is consensus that this strategy is working. There have been marked improvements in reading ability and the volume of reading that students are engaged in.

There is a desire among some staff members to collaborate around integrated curricula and instructional strategies. The Visiting Team suggests the staff continue to find time and methods for integrating core concepts across all content areas and grade levels. Additionally, the Visiting Team encourages the adoption of grade level teaming.

The Jordan School District evaluates teachers using the "J-PASS" evaluation system. This evaluation requires each teacher to show evidence that his or her curriculum is aligned with the core. It also requires an accounting by each teacher that his or her instruction will incorporate higher-level teaching skills. The Visiting Team suggests that these efforts will have more impact when done through a collaborative/teaming effort.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

The staff at Elk Ridge Middle School has adopted several initiatives that tie directly to the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs). Especially noteworthy is the DEAR program, aimed at increasing student abilities in reading. One class period each day is devoted to reading. Students have 30 minutes during the period to read. Teachers may also teach a character lesson and make class or school announcements during this period. It was observed by the Visiting Team that, for the most part, everyone, including teachers, was reading during the designated period. It was noted that library utilization has increased dramatically since the program was implemented, and there has been an increase in language arts scores in end-of-level testing.

Over the past year and a half, all departments have implemented the RESULTS Cycle program. In this model the department examines student curriculum needs from a variety of assessments. From this data, department members choose a specific strategy to emphasize during the quarter. Teachers begin the quarter with a pre-test and end with a post-test, the results of which are reported to the administration. During the quarter, student competency is assessed with a variety of evaluative techniques.

The school has adopted the Utah Behavior Initiative (UBI). Each month there is a specific behavior trait emphasized. A coordinated effort is made to teach this character trait in every classroom. The Visiting Team encourages the continuation of this and other classroom practices that reinforce the school's DRSLs.

## **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

During the Visiting Team's two-day visit, most members of the school staff used a variety of learning experiences to engage students in the learning process. Teaching strategies observed during the course of the visit included direct instruction, collaboration, independent student exploration, and classroom discussions to explore ideas, concept, and principles. Some teachers included other research-based "best practices" activities such as the use of technology, cooperative learning groups, role-playing, hands-on activities, problem-based inquiry, laboratory activities, student presentations, PowerPoint presentations, reciprocal teaching, literature circles, and peer tutoring. Several teachers have attended workshops and conferences to increase their skills and their knowledge of proven teaching strategies. Teachers are encouraged to bring material back to the school and to instruct others on the concepts learned. Students observed that many teachers at Elk Ridge Middle School did use a variety of strategies to present and teach their lessons. However, some students did indicate that in a few classrooms there is not much variety in teaching techniques and methods used. The primary method used in these classrooms was lecture.

The Visiting Team applauds the efforts of those teachers who understand and use a wide variety of instructional methods, and recommends that the staff as a whole continue to avail itself of courses and instruction that will help create variety and vitality in lessons, expand teachers' repertoire of research-based "best practices," and help teachers share successful strategies with their colleagues.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

In classes observed by the Visiting Team, most teachers were using a variety of instructional strategies. Differentiated instruction is used in some areas of the school, and there are some teachers who routinely offer a menu of activities that may function to meet the variety of learning styles of their students. One teacher routinely seats students in pairs and matches a lower achiever with a higher achiever. This has been a valuable technique that has benefited both students.

Teachers are given several opportunities to acquire skills in a variety of instructional strategies through professional development sessions held at the school. Some teachers also take advantage of professional development through workshops, seminars, and conferences paid for by the school. The administration also supports the efforts of teachers to acquire competency in various teaching techniques by purchasing books and other resource materials for them to share.

An interesting observation made by the Visiting Team was that several teachers, in their response to the survey on instructional methods, indicated that their primary method of instruction was lecture and practice. When the school leadership team spoke to these individuals, the discussion revealed that in

actuality they were using a wider variety of techniques than the teachers themselves had recognized.

Discussions with students, parents, and staff members revealed that some staff members are lacking the skills and understanding necessary to meet the diverse needs of all students. Most, however, were very welcoming and accommodating and able to meet the needs of all students. This was especially apparent in their work with special education students, as evidenced in classes that were teamtaught by a regular education teacher and a resource teacher, as well as accommodations that were being made in regular education classes. To help the English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, a study skills class is offered that helps them keep abreast of assignments and gives ESL students some additional support. This may be especially significant as the ESL population increases. The Visiting Team recommends that teachers continue to work with special education teachers as well as district specialists to obtain the behavioral and academic skills needed to work with students with specific diverse needs.

The Visiting Team commends the school for its use of the RESULTS Cycle to assess deficiencies and make modifications in classroom instruction. While this can be a positive tool in determining student needs, the Visiting Team recommends that Elk Ridge Middle School also include other important data, such as state and national norm-referenced tests and CRT scores, to drive its instructional strategies. The Visiting Team recommends that the administration make testing data available to the teaching staff in a timely manner, and that the staff be trained on interpretation and use of this data to address the needs of all learners.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

Elk Ridge Middle School teachers seem very willing to be available before and after school when a student needs help. The Math Department has a formal schedule of when teachers are available for after school tutoring. However, one student observed that she had attempted to attend a math tutoring session on four different occasions, but that there had not been a teacher available. Other students had a better measure of success with this program.

Elk Ridge Middle School provides students with many opportunities to enrich their learning beyond the classroom through before and after school programs and activities. These activities include mock trials, Science Olympiad, MESA, Model U.N., National Junior Honor Society, Jazz Band, intramurals, Math Counts, and Reality Town.

## **Quality Assessment Systems:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

Each teacher at Elk Ridge Middle School has developed periodic formative and summative assessments to determine the level of mastery of course concepts. These assessments include oral and PowerPoint presentations, portfolios, journals, creative inquiry, and various projects that complement traditional methods. Many departments use pre- and post-tests to guide their curricula. As a result of multiple classroom observations and conversations with stakeholders, the Visiting Team determined that school-wide assessment is primarily left to the district or state. Since standardized test results are not returned in a timely manner, nor are faculty members trained in interpreting the information, most faculty members work independently, developing their own tests to establish students' grades and assess acquisition of knowledge and skills. The Visiting Team recommends that teachers work collaboratively within their departments to measure the degree of learning among their students.

The Visiting Team found that great success was experienced with the RESULTS Cycle and recommends the continuation and elaboration of this program. Collaboration among the teaching staff of Elk Ridge Middle School will strengthen the staff's ability to further develop consistent school-wide assessment expectations. The Visiting Team encourages Elk Ridge Middle School to further define expectations for student achievement and develop performance standards.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

The Visiting Team observed the use of several types of assessment tools during the visit, such as pre- and post-tests, rubrics, journals, portfolios, the Six Traits of Writing, research projects, teacher-generated tests, and informal observation. However, the Visiting Team could not confirm the frequency with which these different strategies were used in the classroom. The incorporation of these strategies appears to be limited to a few faculty members who use them frequently.

The Visiting Team feels that the staff and students at Elk Ridge Middle School would greatly benefit from the implementation of rubrics to guide instruction and learning. The Visiting Team recommends that time be set aside for professional development to help teachers learn more about developing and using rubrics.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

From interviews with students and other stakeholders, it is evident that the staff is committed to fair and equitable assessment of student performance. As the staff increases its use of multiple assessments and further refines the process of identifying performance standards and aligning appropriate assessment instruments to those standards, equity and fairness are further guaranteed.

## **Leadership for School Improvement:**

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The administration and teacher leaders at Elk Ridge Middle School have established an academic learning climate that supports teaching and learning. The current administration has provided the necessary leadership to enable and empower the teachers to become more effective. Students feel valued and important. All stakeholders recognize a dramatic increase in morale, which has produced a positive learning environment.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The leadership of Elk Ridge Middle School is learning to employ data-driven, research-based decision making. Departments have collaborated and developed a RESULTS Cycle that produces student achievement data. The data is discussed in departmental meetings, and areas of concern are identified and addressed. Although data is limited, the leadership realizes the need to collect additional data as well as use the available data in more meaningful ways.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

The leadership of Elk Ridge Middle School is in the initial stages of developing a comprehensive assessment system. The development of a comprehensive assessment system aligned with the DRSLs will be necessary as the school implements the action plan. The leadership does analyze Iowa Test, CRT, and RESULTS Cycle data in an effort to improve teaching and learning.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The leadership at Elk Ridge Middle School provides skillful stewardship of the school. Parents, students, and staff members repeatedly commended the school's leadership for improving the school's culture and climate. All indications are that

Elk Ridge is a safe school that provides a positive environment in which to learn. The school's beliefs and mission are consistent with school-wide policies and procedures. The allocation and use of resources are aligned with school goals.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

The allocation and use of resources at Elk Ridge Middle School are aligned with the school goals and school improvement plan. Elk Ridge Middle School is in the initial stages of addressing its desired results for student learning. The Visiting Team recommends that allocations be made in the support and implementation of the DRSLs in the classroom.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

The Visiting Team recognizes the positive and productive relationships that exist among students, teachers, support staff, parents and administrators. Teachers especially feel empowered and appreciate the trust the school leadership has placed in them. The CSIP committee has been a driving force behind the school's improvement plan. This committee has representation from each department that filters down to all teachers. The staff at the school is hoping to have more time set aside for collaboration efforts in the future. The Visiting Team encourages the staff to continue its efforts to collaborate across departments in order to provide cross-curricular connections for students.

## **Community Building:**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

The Visiting Team observed evidence that there is a sense of community at Elk Ridge Middle School fostered by students, staff, administration, and parents. It was evident that all of these stakeholders are playing a role in cultivating positive relationships and a sense of safety and trust. Positive and productive working relationships are evident among students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents. During interviews, both students and faculty voiced approval of Elk Ridge Middle School and its environment. A strong sense of community is demonstrated through parent involvement, administrative support, student connection, and staff dedication.

A positive feeling of community is created through collaborative activities among all stakeholders. Teachers call upon the expertise of special education teachers

and ESL leaders to assist those students mainstreamed into their classes and address challenges together. The DEAR reading program and various reading competitions also help to increase the sense of community at Elk Ridge Middle School. The Community Council and PTSA are involved in providing parent support to the students, faculty, and administration. The administration of Elk Ridge Middle School sponsors a series of positive student feedback programs that are supported by parents and the business community.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

Elk Ridge Middle School extends the school community through collaborative networks of support for student learning. Parent involvement in the school appears to be on the increase. Parent volunteers are welcome and encouraged to assist in individual classrooms and extracurricular activities. A monthly newsletter is mailed to all parents to keep them informed on what is happening at the school. Local businesses donate prizes for various student achievement programs on a regular basis.

Elk Ridge Middle School has a fully functional website with teacher web pages, PowerSchool grades, attendance, and other valuable information. The Visiting Team recommends that teacher websites include disclosure statements and posting of daily assignments at least a week in advance.

## **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

The Visiting Team found the Elk Ridge Middle School staff, counselors, and administration committed to school improvement and professional development. The staff has been focused on achieving the goal of literacy, and received extensive professional development on reading strategies to help meet this goal. About four years ago, the staff implemented the DEAR program as a means of motivating students to read and improving students' literacy skills. Data compiled by the Literacy Committee shows that a greater percentage of books are being checked out from the school library and students have increased their ability to read. The Visiting Team commends Elk Ridge Middle School for its commitment to literacy instruction.

The staff has also received professional development on Character Education, the Utah Behavioral Initiative, and the RESULTS Cycle. Through the RESULTS Cycle program, teachers meet quarterly in their departments to create pre- and post-tests, analyze data, and set departmental goals based on the data. The

Visiting Team recommends that Elk Ridge Middle School continue the RESULTS Cycle and continue collecting and analyzing data as a means of informing instructional practices.

The Visiting Team recommends that the staff move toward professional development on the implementation and assessment of the DRSLs through use of the rubrics that have been developed by the school's leadership team.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The Visiting Team observed a commitment among Elk Ridge Middle School's staff in support of continuous change and improvement. Many staff members stated that they feel more empowered this year due to supportive and trusting relationship with the current administration than in past years. The Visiting Team commends the administration of Elk Ridge Middle School for fostering a culture of excellence and support.

A variety of programs and events are offered to students to enrich their middle school experience, such as vocal and instrumental concerts, weight room training and intramural basketball, MESA, Mock Trial, Model U.N., Geography Bee, and Math Counts.

The Visiting Team commends the staff of Elk Ridge Middle School for its commitment to adopting the middle school philosophy, and encourages the school to follow through with its goal of establishing smaller learning communities through teams of core teachers.

The Visiting Team recommends that the staff of Elk Ridge Middle School create opportunities for training on implementation of the school's action plan. Discussions with staff members revealed that several of them were not cognizant of the plan and needed the time and opportunity to discuss and find ways to support and implement the plan in their classrooms. In addition, the Visiting Team recommends that the staff work toward narrowing and sharpening the focus of the action plan to something more definitive and measurable. Strategies should be developed and put in place for meeting the goals of the action plan.

# CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high /middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, only by the USOE—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

## CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

The action plan addresses the major concerns identified in the self-study. The action plan is fairly comprehensive, with broad indicators. The Visiting Team recommends that the action steps in each action plan be made more specific. Some of the action steps listed in each action plan have been in place for several years. The staff should reevaluate the effectiveness of these steps and explore alternative or additional programs or practices that would further the goals of the action plan.

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

There appears to be a strong commitment to the action plan by most members of the staff. A few staff members were not as aware of the action plan as the majority of the staff. Parents and students are not as fully committed, due largely to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the action plan. More should be done to involve and educate staff members, parents, and students about the action plan.

c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

Most staff members have a clear understanding of what they need to do to accomplish the goals of the action plan. The Visiting Team recommends that the school include measurable objectives in the action steps so that progress can be monitored. Use of disaggregated data, additional professional development, and increased involvement by parents and students will be critical in achieving the school's goals.

# CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

## **Commendations:**

• The Visiting Team recognizes that the school leadership team and the CSIP committee made a sincere effort to do a through analysis of the school's strengths and limitations, and commends them for this effort.

- The administration is to be commended for its support of the staff and its positive professional relationship with students, parents, and the community, and for its willingness to share leadership of the school with the stakeholders.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff for the variety of ways in which student success is celebrated (through announcements, drawings, prizes, displays, etc.).
- The Visiting Team commends the school for its efforts to create a positive and safe learning environment, for holding high expectations for student learning, and for having a staff characterized by caring educators willing to do whatever is necessary to help students succeed.
- The staff of Elk Ridge Middle School is to be commended for its use of a variety of instructional strategies, including the Six Traits of Writing, the RESULTS Cycle, and the DEAR program.
- The Visiting Team commends the school and staff for their desire to move toward implementing middle-level practices and strategies that will better address the needs of middle school students.

## **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop an effective data collection and management system that can be utilized to provide reliable data for making judgments regarding the academic growth of individual students or groups of students. This effort should extend to disaggregating state and national norm-referenced test data, as well as school-generated data, by content cluster, student group, gender, grade level, and ethnicity.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school find ways to creatively include all stakeholders, including students, parents, and the community, as participants in all aspects of the accreditation process. Increased discussion and communication among students, parents, and the community would help support the goals and objectives of the school's action plan.
- The Visiting Team recognizes the efforts of the staff to infuse the school's DRSLs into the curriculum. The Visiting Team recommends that teachers make these DRSLs explicit in each lesson plan as it is presented.
- In reading the self-study, the Visiting Team noted a lack of identifiable interventions for students who are not learning. The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop programs and strategies to address the needs of these students.

